

[J. F. Smith]

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William E. Smith

Corsicana City Guide

Pioneer Resident.

Writers' Project

District #8

Palestine, Texas [?]

Page 1 LIFE STORY OF J. F. SMITE, CORSICANA, TEXAS

To begin with my name is John Franklin Smith, known to old settlers as Frank Smith. I was born September 19, 1852, in Bates county, Missouri, in the town of Pleasant Gap. My father was Joe Smith, he moved from Kentucky to northeastern Missouri, along with his father and other relatives, but did not like this part of the country so after years of residence here he moved to southwestern Missouri where I was born. There was thirteen children in our family, seven boys and six girls. There was three younger than I, and the youngest two were twin boys.

The first I can remember of my Missouri home, was the hauling of lumber and brick from Sedalia, Missouri to build our house and barn. At that time we lived in a four room log house with stick and dirt chimney and board shingles. The two front rooms had a large hallway between them with a dirt chimneys at each end of the rooms. My father wa like

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all other southern farmers, having a number of slaves, including children and all, they numbered over a hundred, some of them cost him \$1500, he never sold a mother from her children, nor sold any children from their parents. He once bought a family for \$3000. He sent some of the negro men to Sedalia with wagons and teams of mules to haul the finish lumber and brick back to Pleasant Gap to build our house and barn. The chimneys and foundation of the barn and house were of brick, the frame work of the house and barn was of native lumber coming from my father's sawmill located on his plantation on the [Merrizene?] River. My father built a large twelve room house, southern colonial style home, about a quarter of a mile from the town of Pleasant Gap, facing the town at the end of Main street. The front yard was large, covering about two or three acres with large post oak trees scattered about for shade. He also had a plank fence in front with a platform next to the road and steps on the side to the house. Hitch posts were on the side to the road. Platform at one side was low enough for visitors to drive up in coach or buggy and stop out an platform, still at another place ladies could ride up horseback to this part and step off and come down the steps into the yard. All ladies in those days 2 rode in side saddles when riding a horse, and they could ride as fast and as far as the men.

The house which we lived in until the war, was a two-story house with a large front porch, with large round columns that reached to the roof of the second story. There were two bedrooms downstairs, the other being upstairs. Our livingroom was a large room covering about one-fourth of the first floor. At one end of it was a large brick fireplace large enough to burn cord wood. It would take two slaves to put an a back log, and it sure did threw out the heat. The dining room and kitchen was back of this. We had a large long table in the dining room, and I have seen as many an thirty people eating at this table at one time. My father never turned any traveler away from his home, he would always give them lodging and feed for their stock without charge.

Behind the house was the cook and servant house, and the smokehouse where we kept all the meat. This meat and lard was issued to the slaves once a week. I have seen the slaves kill as many as fifty hogs at one time, all the killing, cleaning and dressing was done

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in one day- the next day lard was made and the meat packed. The meat box was built in the meat house, which was large enough for a man to get in and walk around. Behind this the barn was off quite a distance. It was large enough to hold over a thousand bushels of corn and plenty of hay to feed over two hundred head of stock, with stalls for twenty-two teams of mules and sheds for the balance and plenty of sheds for the milk cows. Behind the barn was a plank lot too where the hogs were called up and fed. We always fed them a little to keep them coming up so we could mark the young pigs, as the hogs ran out the year round. My father had his entire twenty-seven acres fenced off with plank which came from the sawmill. All of the posts were sawed square at both ends and the same length, and were put in the ground at the same depth. All the boards were spaced alike around the fields and pasture. About a hundred yards to the west were the slave quarters, with two rows of houses [facing?] each other with a wide street between them. All of these houses were built from native lumber, with stock and dirt chimney. A wood pile was behind each house for them. Our wood was stacked in the northeast corner of our back yard. A pile was kept there in the winter time larger than an ordinary house for our use. Our wood pile lay north, east and west from our house, with most of the farming land to the north and east, running back down in the bottom. This land was planted in corn, cotton, hay, watermelons, garden vegetables and a large field of beans, peas and potatoes. The corn was check rowed and planted by hand, by doing this it could be plowed in each direction, this would keep down hoeing. Cotton was planted like it always is, to be chopped and hoed and hoed again. The garden was very large and worked by the slaves, also for the use of us all but not to be wasted. Any slave caught wasting any thing had to do without his next issue of the particular thing he was caught wasting.

All slaves were allowed to carry watermelons from the patch to the house any time but were not allowed to burst one in the patch as the birds would take to them and ruin the patch. I have seen the little negroes with melon juice all over their face and the front of their clothes many times and still eating melons.

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The peas and beans were planted in large patches or in a sufficient amount so as to be picked when ripe and piled in a large room in the barn on a plank floor and then thrashed out of the hulls with a brushy limb from a small tree or let the slaves tramp them out. Then they were taken outside and poured from a tub or bucket to another, holding the basket high while pouring, letting the wind blow the chaff the broken hulls out of the beans and peas, then they were ready to be cooked. This was done each month or week as they were needed. However the entire field was picked and stored away, peas and beans being separated. The potatoes, cabbage, and turnips were harvested and put in long ricks or piles and logs split and laid against a ridge poll at the top like a house top and corn stalks placed over the cracks and than dirt piled over this fairly deep, just deep enough to shed water and to keep the vegetables from freezing in the winter, this dirt had to be built up after each rain so the vegetables would not got wet, this would keep them all winter. We had to raise what we eat and eat what we raised, as we could not get fresh vegetables from south Texas and other places the year around like we can now, especially when one man had to look out for over one hundred people. 4 We always had fresh meat of some kind, wild turkeys were plentiful. We had lots of deer meat and plenty of small game. Fish was plentiful, we didn't eat small fish like we do now and call them nice fish.

We raised lots of cotton that was planted, plowed, picked and ginned on the same plantation. The cotton was picked in small baskets and emptied into larger baskets and weighed. The slaves could pick as much cotton in those baskets as they can in sacks now.

We had an old negro named Remus that always led the slaves to work. His job was to ring the bell every morning at four o'clock for all the slaves to get up, the men to feed, while the women got breakfast. We all got up at the same time, the men would go on to work after breakfast and the women that did not have nursing babies were to come as soon as their house was cleaned and dinner cooked. The slave women that had nursing babies were to spin, weave and make the cloth for their clothes and were to make most of their clothes, or if they had plenty of clothes or cloth made, they would go to the field still later

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than the other women, but my father mostly found plenty of work at the house or close by for them so they could be near their babies. My father always had plenty of food for his slaves as a well fed negro could do plenty of work and one [that?] could do lots of work would always bring a good price when sold. It was also Remus's job to issue rations each Saturday evening, to every family, enough to run them a week, this was done according to the size of the family, and size of children in the family. Father wanted then to have plenty to eat but nothing to waste.

We never worked on Saturday evenings, or Thanksgiving, Christmas, Fourth of July, but always done a good days work of New Years Day, and I have followed my father's ruling to the present time, do something on New Years Day and you will be busy all the year. For all this extra work father give Remus shoes from the store and factory made tobacco, a hat for dress wear, and pants and shirts from the store. The others wore clothes made on the plantation, except servants that waited on us and special visitors. Then they wore clothes that came from the store or made from cloth that came from the store, The store was in town 5 on the main street and my father hired three clerks besides himself and the older boys who worked in there with him. He handled groceries, clothes, medicines, and what farm tools that was bought in those days, also buggies, surries and wagons. He bought us a fine stage while he was in business there. We had a span of fine mares he brought from Kentucky with him that we worked to it when he first bought it and he finally hocked a span of young mares from these old mares to it, and they sure could carry you down the road holding their heads high like they had plenty of pride, and they did for they were thorough bred. We had a young negro slave named Charley that cared for the stable stock and he knew his business about training these thorough bred breds . We had about thirty head of those Kentucky thorough breds when the war broke out.

About 2:30 o'clock, one [evening?] in 1861, ny father saw the Jayhawkers coming down the road on horses and he could tell by the number and the way they were riding that they were the Yankees, so he told the three clerks to hurry out and go home and he also told my older brothers to go home and tell my mother that he would come on, so he

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locked the store and brought all his money home in a little sack, there was a little over three thousand dollars in that sack that he kept hid around in the store, and about the time he got home the Jayhawkers rode in on Main street and went to stealing and plundering at [ease?]. They robbed all the stores and loaded up what they wanted in those big Government wagons and then set fire to the buildings. Then they started to plundering into every thing. About this time two of my cousins Ben and Tommie Dyer who were twins and about 16 years old had heard about the Jayhawkers coming in and had started home, both were horseback and had been to see one of their cousins and when they got to where they could see them, they split up and made a run for home as their mother was a widow. Ben ran his horse in the back way, put the horse in a stall and ran in the back door of the house, but Tommie tried to go around our burning store and in from the other side, but some of the Jayhawkers started chasing him on horses and when he got behind our store his horse stumbled and fell, falling on one of his legs, he got his leg from under the horse and got up and was bending over when they rode up and shot 14 balls into his body. 6 His mother saw him running from the Jayhawkers, but she never had seen Ben and she thought the Jayhawkers had already killed Ben and was chasing Tommie to kill him, she ran out of the house screaming but she was too late, they would have killed him anyway if she had gotten there [first?], they were just that dirty. When she got to where he lay she fell down over him crying and telling them that they had killed her boys and they laughed in her face. The Captain came up and she asked him to have some of the men carry her boy about one block to her house, and he told them to carry him home, so two of them grabbed hold of his pants legs and started to dragging him off like a hog, and Aunt Mellie begged the Captain to make them stop dragging him, so he made more men get around him and pick him up and carry him home. So four of them got hold of him and when they got to the house they dumped him in the front door on the floor, and if that house still stands, that boy's blood is on the floor, it couldn't be washed up. After the Jayhawkers left the house, Ben ran to the gunrack to get his father's gun, intending to shoot into the Jayhawkers, when Aunt Mellie heard Ben cross the room she looked up expecting to see some of them sneak up on her back to kill her, and she said she was so overjoyed to see him alive and

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run to him and persuaded him not to shoot any of them. He later joined the Southern Army and went through the war without a scratch. He said before he went into the army that he was going to kill a dozen Yankees for every ball shot into his brother's body. When the war was over he said he got part of them.

These Jayhawkers called themselves Home Guards, but they didn't know what home guards were, we called them Jayhawkers. They came an down to the house, rode up in fron front and called. My father went out, my mother following him, then all of us children followed her and crowded around them. I can remember as well as if it happened yesterday, one of the men spread his arms out and said stand back men I'll kill the rascal and raised his gun to shoot when we heard a shout and looked up the road to see what it was and saw Judge Myers coming as fast an his horse could run, shouting as loud as he could. The man dropped his gun to his side, when Judge Myers rode up be was shaking his head and his eyes were blazing fire. He turned around in his saddle and pointed back toward town and said you men get out from here 7 and do it damn quick. (Judge Myers was a nothern man but he was one of my fathers best friends) All the Jayhawkers turned around and sulked off like/ a whipped dog.

When the man all left Judge Myers came up to my father an put his hand on his shoulder and said "Joe you have got to get out of here before you are killed. Now I will escort you to Clinton and you and your family can take the train there and go farther south where you will be safe." My father told him he was a slave owner and that he had already sent all but a very few of his slaves south so they could be taken care of, [that?] he could not desert the people who had confidence in him at a time like that, he would have to shoulder his gun and do his bit to win the war. That it was lawful to buy slaves and to sue them when he first began business and in fact he had bought some of his from Northers speculators, that the Government tolerated that, and now since the southers farmers had their money invested in slaves they wanted them freed. He also thanked Judge Myers for saving his life but under the existing circumstances he would be forced to stay and fight [for?] his rights. Judge Myers begged him still farther to leave but he still refused. My father's parting words

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to the Judge was that he was glad to have such a man as he for a friend and although they were separated in opinion and would probably fight in battle against each other if the war went that far, but he would always consider him as his friend and have a friendly feeling for him.

After this my father, brother Will, Clem and Joe, two cousins and three brother-in-laws and three Uncles went to war, [leaving?] us there with the few slaves to take care of the plantation. That was the last time I ever saw my father, brother Will, one of my cousins and one of my brother-in-laws and one uncle. My brother Will, brother-in-law and cousin was killed in the battle at Lone Jack, Missouri. They were buried some time before me knew they were killed. My father, brother Joe and Clem, one brother-in-law and Uncle got separated from the others and did not know of the tragedy for some time. Later that year my father was wounded and an uncle killed at Mansfield, Missouri. That was the last raid General Price made through there. A lady living there by the name of Lindsay that knew our family had him taken to [?] house. (Her husband was also fighting for the South and was is another part of the state at that time.) 8 She left father with her grown daughters and a good doctor and rode 68 miles horseback to Pleasant Gap to notify us of father being wounded. Mother left us smaller children to the care of the older children and what few slaves was left and she and Mrs. Lindsay took the train back to Mansfield, leaving her horse with us. A few days after mother got there two of father's sisters and nephews came and stayed until after he died. My father got better after mother came and the doctor told her he thought he was out of danger, so father sent her back home to get us children and return to Mansfield to stay until he got well enough to travel then he would go to Texas until the war was over, but he died and was buried [before?] mother could come back and get us children and get back to him, some complication set up that the doctor could not control after mother left. All of us children were very eager to get to our father to see him again but when we got there and was greeted with the sad news there wasn't anything there for us so we returned to Pleasant Gap.

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The town of Pleasant Gap, Missouri, lay in a small neck of timber or a gap between two large strips of timber and was named so.

After we returned home, mother searched for all the valuable papers and several thousand dollars that my father had buried soon after the store was burned. She thought she knew about where she buried them but we never found them. She intended to ask him when she went to him while he was wounded but he got better and was getting so much better she thought she better let him get them himself, if she began digging around and never found them and was seen, some one also might get them before we returned. One of my older sisters also buried \$500, that was never found.

In 1862, my brother-in-law who was a druggist at Pleasant Gap and also a Northern sympathizer but not a helper, persuaded my mother to let him take all her [yearlin?] mules to the county seat and sell them for her before there was another raid through there and they were taken. Well he took them up there and only brought back \$400 to mother. Said he had put that in his shoes and the balance in his coat and pants pockets and when he was coming home was robbed by some bushwackers and all taken off of him except what he had in his shoes. But we never had any confidence in what he told us. 9 Some of our work stock was stole from time to time but in the winter of 1862 the Jayhawkers came through again looking for any thing they could steal and any thing dirty they could do. During this time an old man about sixty years old had [gottne?] sick and mother and us children had moved him to our home as his house was cold and they were afraid he might take pneumonia and his wife was old and could not got around very well to take care of him as it was lots of trouble for us to go back and forth so we moved him to our place.

One day the Jayhawkers made another raid through there. About 60 came to our house and ordered dinner for them all and told us to be sure there was plenty of ham. Mother, the girls and the old slaves began getting their dinner. [While?] they were getting their dinner those men were plundering about the house stealing quilts and tieing them up behind their horses. They were called in for dinner and sat down and ate all they could hold, got up

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from the table and began plundering again and spitting all over the house and started to leave when my mother complained to the Captain that his men had stole all of her quilts. He asked her if she could identify any of then and she pointed out about thirty of them. He looked at her and then turned to an old negro slave woman and asked [her?] if my mother was telling the truth. She said, "Yas sah!" He then told her to identify all the quilts and she said, "I'so she can, I'se been here too long and has helped to make every one of dem, and she pointed out thirty-eight of them, so the captain made then take them all off their saddles and pile them an the front porch. This bunch drove off all of our cattle, horses and mules. One of our old Kentucky mares and some milkcows got away and came back home.

Not long after this another raid was made, one of the men in this bunch was named Sissin and helped build our house. They came in and ordered a meal cooked for them, after they had eaten all they wanted they began plundering. One of them, a young man, walked to the head of the old sick man's bed and said "I believe I will kill the old devil, done lived too long now". He raised his gun and shot him in the head, his brains were scattered all over the head of the bed and wall. I witnessed this with my own eyes. When he walked away he reloaded his gun and made the remark, "I better load it, I might get to kill another dog before sun down". And when they got ready to leave this man was on a young horse, one I guess he had stole, and he had the stock of his gun on the toe of his shoe when his horse shied to 10 one side, the gun slipped off his foot, discharged and blew his whole face away. I said I guess that is the other dog he is going to kill. A man yelled out at me that he would do me the same way if it didn't look so bad for a man to kill a brat. I didn't say any thing back to him.

This band of robbers tore up every feather bed on the place and scattered the feathers ever the rooms, then poured several barrels of sorghum molasses over them and then set fire. They burned the house but did not burn the slave houses or the barn. Then they loaded up about fifty of those large government wagons with corn and hauled that away

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and took every chicken they could catch and all of the meat we had. They also burned the [chorthouse?] at the county seat.

We lived for a few days in some of the slave houses, then we hooked the old Kentucky mare, old Julia, and two milk cows to two sleds, put our few belongings on them and left Southeast Missouri for Northeast Missouri to my grandfathers in Henry county. This was a long hard journey for a woman and children through territory where there was lots of buskwackers. There were plenty of them in this part of the country and it had been raided and raided. There wasn't much left to eat and we couldn't taje much with us. We traveled quite a bit by moonlight and grazed the stock in the daytime, and gathered what we could to eat for ourselves. We finally made the trip to my grandfathers, but we were scared all the time we would get our stock taken away from us. Mother took ever \$3000 in money through with her in a little square tin box painted green. I never will forget what that little box looked like for we guarded it very closely.

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